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WESTPORT HISTORICAL SOCIETY TO CHANGE NAME TO WESTPORT MUSEUM FOR HISTORY & CULTURE

New name to be launched at group's annual benefit September 28th; reflects evolution into nationally recognized museum and cultural institution

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September 19, 2019—Fresh off its win of a national award from the American Association for State and Local History (AASLH) Westport Historical Society is announcing the newest chapter in its evolution with a name change. Formally taking effect September 28th with the launch of its 2019/20 exhibit *Becoming Westport* the new name will be Westport Museum For History & Culture.

“The name change is part of a strategic planning process that the organization underwent from 2014 to 2017 with the help of a state program funded by CT Humanities,” said Sara Krasne, Westport Museum Board Chairperson. “The Board of Directors voted to change the name back in 2017 but elected to wait until this year to formalize it after some milestones had been reached.”

The program in which Westport Museum participated is called the Standards and Excellence Program for History Organizations and allowed the organization's Board of Directors to re-evaluate operations, funding, mission and more.

Official roll-out of the name will take place at the Westport Museum's annual benefit dinner, *Night at the Museum* Saturday, September 28th which will feature celebrity Chef Chris Scott who was a finalist on Bravo's Top Chef and a Q&A Keynote by CNN anchor Alisyn Camerota. Live music, costumed interpreters and silent auction of uniquely Westport experiences will round out the event.

That evening will also mark the opening of *Becoming Westport* the first exhibit under the museum's new name. Featuring archetypes of individuals who helped build the town, the exhibit follows the evolution of Westport from colonial settlement through the 20th century.

"We've been working hard toward meeting best practices of museums nationwide, including providing interactive exhibits and programming that use our local story as a relatable way to explore regional and national stories," said Westport Museum, Executive Director, Ramin Ganeshram. "The name change reflects the work we have done toward this goal to date and the national recognition we have received for it."

The Museum's 2018/19 exhibit *Remembered: The History of African Americans in Westport* was widely praised for its high level of quality which received regional and national accolades. Westport Public School 3rd, 8th and 10th graders saw the exhibit as part of current curriculum. Other initiatives over the last year from free public activities to creating a welcoming campus open to all have pushed the organization further toward the accepted standards of modern cultural institutions.

"I commend the Board of Directors for their work over the last years to move the organization toward a more inclusive interpretation of history," said Ganeshram. "The work we've done over the last two years is in keeping with the evolution of many colleague organizations in Connecticut and around the country."

In 2014 Fairfield Historical Society changed its name to the Fairfield Museum and History Center and in 2018 year Stamford Historical Society followed suit. Nationally, Richmond Historical Society was renamed Virginia Museum for History and Culture in 2018. Similar name changes have been undertaken by historical societies in Ohio, Colorado and elsewhere.

Westport Historical Society's change in directive also follows a trend among local cultural organizations to become more expansive and regional in their scope. The Westport Library's transformation project, completed in 2019, evolved the library from a simple repository for books to a multimedia center with state of the art performance venues that have lured visitors county and statewide. The Westport Arts Center recently moved to a larger locale, changing its name to Museum of Contemporary Art reflective of the world-class shows and expansive scope it has achieved in the last few years.

“We’re proud of our many steps forward over the last two years,” said Krasne. “The new name more adequately represents the work the Museum is doing daily to fulfill our mission to inspire the holistic discovery of our town’s history inclusive of our collective heritage and its place in the larger American story.”

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ABOUT WESTPORT MUSEUM FOR HISTORY & CULTURE: The award-winning Westport Museum for History & Culture is a cultural center devoted to providing engaging, interactive interpretation of local history inclusive of all stories and all people. Located in beautiful downtown Westport, the Museum provides a variety of programming for people of all ages including an abundance of free events for the community to enjoy. From beloved yearly events such as annual Garden Tour to Spooktober, a full month of harvest and Halloween programming in October to the beloved Holly Days, an ecumenical December celebration for the holiday season to unique happenings from performances, lectures, readings and interactive activities, the Museum strives to present history in a fun, modern context. In the 2018/19 program year, as Westport Historical Society the Westport Museum for History & Culture received accolade, local and regional awards, and national award nominations for its ground-breaking exhibit *Remembered: The History of African Americans in Westport*.